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A LETTER TO A Member of Parliament,

Shewing, that a

RESTRAINT

On the

PRESS

Is inconſiſtent with the Proteſtant Religion, and dangerous to the Liberties of the Nation.

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A

LETTER

TO A

A LETTER TO A Member of Parliament.

SIR,

ACcording to your Commands, I here preſent you with thoſe Reaſons that oblige me to oppoſe the Reſtraining the Preſs, as inconſiſtent with the Proteſtant Religion, and dangerous to the Liberties of the Nation: Both which I undertake to ſhew. And in order to prove the firſt, I beg leave to premiſe,

Firſt, That which makes a Man to differ from a Brute, wholly uncapable of forming any Notion of Religion, is his Reaſon; which is the only Light God has given him, not only to diſcover that there is a Religion, but to diſtinguiſh the true from the many falſe ones. He therefore that employs his Reaſon to the beſt of his Ability to find out Religious Truth, in order to practiſe it, does all that God deſires: for God, who will not command Impoſſibilities, can require no more of him, than that he impartially ſearches after, and endeavours to diſcover Religious Truth, by the uſe of that Reaſon which was given him for that end. He that does this, may have the ſatisfaction of doing his Duty as a rational Creature, and may be ſure, tho he miſ-

ſes Truth, he ſhall not miſs the Reward that is due to him who obeys his Maker, in following as well as he could, and no more could be his Duty, the only Guide God has given him to judg of Truth and Falſhood. On the contrary, he that neglects to do this, is diſobedient to his Maker, in miſuſing his rational Faculties; and tho he ſhould light on Truth, the luckineſs of the Accident will no way excuſe his Diſobedience: for God will judg us as we are accountable (that is, rational) Creatures; and conſequently our Reward from him, whether we hit or miſs of Truth, will be in an exact proportion to the uſe we make of our Reaſon: And if God has oblig'd us to uſe it as the only means to diſtinguiſh Truth from Falſhood, that alone muſt be the way to find the one, and avoid the other. Now the way that a Man's Reaſon does this, is by examining thoſe Proofs, Arguments, or Mediums, that either himſelf or others have found out, and by comparing them with his common and ſelf-evident Notions, by means of which he finds out the agreement or diſagreement of any Propoſition with thoſe Standards and Teſts of Truth.

Tho this is the only way to diſcover Truth, yet if a Man was left wholly to himſelf, without any to inform his Judgment, he would make but a very ſmall Diſcovery in Religious, or any other Truths: Therefore it's Mens mutual Duty to inform each other in thoſe Propoſitions they apprehend to be true, and the Arguments by which they endeavour to prove them; which cannot be done ſo well as by *Printing* them, ten thouſand Books, after the Letters are once ſet, being ſooner Printed than one Tranſcribed: By *the Advantage of which, Men, tho at never ſo great diſtance, may, with a great deal of Eaſe and little Charge, be exactly acquainted with each others Sentiments.* And it's wholly owing to *Printing*, that Knowledg is become, not only much more diffuſive, but that a great deal of more uſeful Knowledg has been diſcovered in a ſhort time ſince that Invention, than in many Ages before. And if it has not had as great effect in moſt places with reſpect to Religious as to other Knowledg,

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it can only be becauſe the Liberty of *Printing*, as to the former, has been more reſtrained; for Men have the ſame way of judging of that as of all other Matters.

This being premiſed, 'tis clear that the *Preſs* ought not to be reſtrained:

1. Becauſe it tends to make Men blindly ſubmit to the Religion they chance to be educated in: for if 'tis once ſuppos'd unlawful to publiſh any Arguments againſt that Religion, it cannot be denied but that 'tis as unlawful to read and examine thoſe Arguments, that being the ſole Reaſon of forbidding the *printing* them; which neceſſarily ſuppoſeth they are to take their Religion on truſt, without any trial, which is the greateſt Fault that can be, next to having no Religion at all: For I cannot ſee any ground a Man has to hope to go to Heaven, that will not be at the pains to examine what it is that God requires of him in order to his coming thither.

2. Becauſe it deprives Men of the moſt proper and beſt means to diſcover Truth, by hindering them from ſeeing and examining the different Opinions, and the Arguments alledg'd for them. I can ſee no Reaſon why 'tis more neceſſary for him that judges for others, than 'tis for him who judges for himſelf, to ſee the Arguments on all ſides; this being the only evidence by which any Man is to judg. The ſuppreſſing the Evidence in a Cauſe where Mens eternal Happineſs is concerned, is (I take it) much more criminal than in a Cauſe of a temporal Intereſt. So that a Law to oblige the Judges to hear the Proofs but of one ſide, is not as bad as to truſt the Clergy of any one Sect with the Preſs; who, to be ſure, will ſuffer nothing to be *printed* but of their own ſide; and who too, in all probability, will miſrepreſent their Adverſaries, and their Opinions, more than a Pleader will the Party or Cauſe againſt which he is engaged. And are not the People (for inſtance) amongſt the Papiſts, where the *Preſs* is effectually reſtrained, as ignorant of what can be alledged againſt the Popiſh Doctrines, as a Judg that has heard but one ſide can be of the Defence the other is to make?

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3. Becauſe it hinders Truth from having any great influence on Mens Minds: which is owing chiefly to Examination, becauſe the more rational That makes an Opinion appear, the greater power it will have on the Affections; which are not moved without ſome ſenſible connexion between the Cauſe and Effect; for what does not convince the Underſtanding, will have but little or no effect on the Will: Which is one reaſon why Men are obliged to *try all things*, becauſe when they ſee the reaſonableneſs of any Opinion, it will oblige them to act according to it more heartily than when they take it on truſt: and nothing more endears Truth to us, than that its diſcovery is the effect of our own Induſtry and Obſervation.

4. Becauſe it tends to make us hold the Truth (ſhould we chance to light on it) guiltily: for that (as I have already proved) will not be accepted, if it be not the Effect of an impartial Examination; which makes Error it ſelf innocent: for if any thing in that caſe be a fault, it muſt be the Examination, becauſe That might have been prevented; but the Opinion that's cauſed by it could not, That being a neceſſary Conſequence of the other. Men when they are left to themſelves without any Clergy at all, are more likely not only to judg for themſelves, but to make a truer and a more impartial Judgment, than when they are permitted to know the Sentiments of the Clergy but of one Sect, who then may impoſe on them what ever out of Intereſt they think fit.

5. One Reaſon why God hath ſo formed Mankind, that each alone without the help of others cannot well ſubſiſt, is to oblige them to mutual love and kindneſs, and to contribute to one anothers happineſs. And they want each others aſſiſtance for things of the Mind as well as of the Body. For a Man would be in a miſerable ſtate of Darkneſs and Ignorance, were it not for the Light that others afford him: and therefore they are obliged to increaſe as much as they can each others Knowledg, eſpecially in Religion, which they can no otherwiſe do, than by communicating to one another what they think is the Truth,

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and the Reaſon by which they endeavour to prove it. To oblige Men to do this, God has not only implanted in them a ſtrong deſire to find out Religious Truth, but as great an inclination to teach others what they apprehend to be ſo; and there is no Man who believes a Doctrine to be true, but would be very glad to get it owned by others. Whoſoever therefore endeavours to hinder Men from communicating their Thoughts, (as they notoriouſly do that are for reſtraining the Preſs) invade the natural Rights of Mankind, and deſtroy the common Ties of Humanity. If we muſt, *early and late*, according to the Wiſe Man's direction, *ſeek after Wiſdom as after a hidden Treaſure*; I cannot ſee how it will become the *Wiſdom* of a Nation to endeavour by a Law to hinder us from knowing more than the ſcanty Meaſure a Party-Licencer will afford us.

Not only the Light of Nature, but the written Word (*Levit.* 19. 17. 1 *Theſſ.* 5. 14. *Heb.* 3. 13.) obliges every one, Lay as well as Clergy, to exhort, warn, rebuke, and uſe all means poſſible to bring his miſtaken Brother into the right way; which he can no otherwiſe do, than by firſt judging himſelf what is right and wrong; and then by uſing Arguments to perſwade him whom he judges in the wrong, to deſiſt from it. And if, as the Scripture ſuppoſeth, no Man can neglect to do this without *hating his Brother*; every one has a right to print his Sentiments as the beſt, if not the only way to *exhort*, *rebuke*, *reprove* Myriads of Brethren at the ſame time.

In ſhort, in all Ages the greater Mens Zeal hath been towards God, and the more inflamed their Love to their Neighbours, the more they have thought it their Duty (tho with the hazard of their Lives) to communicate to others what they judged to be the Truth. And all Sects, how different ſo ever in all other things, do agree in thinking themſelves bound thereto, as to the greateſt Act of Charity; and conſequently there is no Sect that hinders others from publiſhing what they believe to be Truth, but ſins againſt the natural and revealed Law, and breaks that golden Rule (the Foundation of all Morality) of *do-*

ing as they would be done unto. For tho they look upon it as impious and tyrannical for any to hinder them from imparting to others those Doctrines they judg to be true, yet they themſelves would hinder all others, who have as much right to judg for themſelves, and are as much obliged to communicate to others what they judg to be a Religious Truth.

What can be more inhumane, as well as ungrateful, than to puniſh that Perſon who out of love to Truth, and charity to the Souls of his Brethren, beſtows his Time, perhaps to the detriment of his Health and Fortune, in publiſhing what he judges to be for their eternal Good? If this be a juſt Reward for ſuch an Undertaking, I cannot ſee how the Clergy can deſerve ſuch Riches and Honours for doing but the ſame thing; that is, for inſtructing others in that they judg to be true.

Nothing can be more unbecoming the Dignity of a rational Nature, than to bar up the way to religious Knowledg and Wiſdom, which Men have no way to propagate, but by offering one another Reaſons and Arguments: And there can be no Pretence to hinder Men from doing this by reſtraining the *Preſs*, but what will as ſtrongly forbid them doing it any other way. In a word, Men have the ſame right to communicate their Thoughts, as to think themſelves; and where the one is denied, the other is ſeldom uſed, or to little purpoſe: For,

Men as they are more or leſs hindred from communicating their Thoughts, are more or leſs ſtupid and ignorant, and their Religion more or leſs corrupted: And this is not only true with relation to *Mahometans* and *Pagans*, who ſuffer no *Printing* at all, except the *Chineſe* (whoſe Knowledg above other Eaſtern Nations ſeems to be owing to that Art, tho among them wonderfully rude and imperfect) but with reſpect to Chriſtians, amongſt whom one would think it almoſt impoſſible, conſidering what Light and Knowledg the Goſpel brought into the World, that any ſhould be ſo groſly ignorant and ſuperſtitious as the Papiſts are, or that the Chriſtian Religion ſhould be ſo much

much depraved as it is amongſt them: and what is this owing to, but the denying the People the Liberty of the Preſs, and all other ways of freely debating matters of Religion? And had it not been for this Invention, whereby men had ſuch an eaſy way of communicating their Thoughts, nothing but a ſecond Revelation could have freed them from that maſs of Ignorance and Superſtition the Chriſtian World lay under; and which was every day increaſing, and does ſtill remain in a very high degree in thoſe Countries that groan under Reſtraint, as *Portugal*, *Spain*, *Italy*; which laſt, ſutably to the Freedom once it enjoyed, abounded with Men eminent in all Learning and Knowledg, as well as Vertue and Bravery: and that it is ſo much degenerated now (the Climate and the make of their Bodies being ſtill the ſame) is owing to nothing but that Prieſtcraft which forbids all Freedom; contrary to the practice of antient *Rome*, where to think on what one had a mind to, and to ſpeak ones thoughts as freely as to think them, was looked on as one of the chief Bleſſings of a Free Government.

It's not only in Popiſh, but in Proteſtant Countries too, that according to the Reſtraint Men lay under, Ignorance, Superſtition, and Bigotry does more or leſs abound. *Denmark*, *Sweden*, and ſeveral other Countries, are undeniable Inſtances of this; and it cannot be otherwiſe, for there is little difference between having no Reaſon, and not exerciſing it. And it's evident that the Clergy themſelves are not only more knowing, and reaſon much better, but are much more ſober, careful and exemplary, where liberty of Debating is allowed, than where denied. From what has been urged, I think I may ſafely conclude, that Men, if they regard the employing their rational Faculties as God requires, and (the Conſequence of it) the diſcovery of Truth in Religion, and their being influenced by it as they ought to be, are obliged to allow one another an entire liberty in communicating their Thoughts, which was never forbidden, but where Intereſt ſupplanted Religion.

6. There's no medium between Mens judging for themſelves, and giving up their Judgments to others. If the firſt be their Duty, the Preſs ought not to be reſtrained, becauſe it debars them from ſeeing thoſe Allegations by which they are to inform their Judgments. All the Arguments that are or can be urged for the regulating the Preſs, have no other Foundation than that of People's being liable to miſtake, and ſubject to be impoſed on by fallacious Arguments and ſpecious Pretences: which inſtead of proving what they deſign, only ſhows the greater Neceſſity for the freedom of the Preſs; for the more apt Men are to miſtake and to be deceiv'd, the leſs reaſon there is for their relying on any one Party, but the more to examine with all care and diligence the Reaſons on all ſides, and conſequently for the Preſs being open to all Parties, one as well as the other. So that thoſe that are for allowing Men the liberty of judging for themſelves (if any ſuch can be for regulating the Preſs) are very unhappy in their Arguments, becauſe they all make againſt themſelves, and out of their own Mouths they are condemned.

But if Men are to give up their Reaſon to the Clergy, of whatſoever Denomination, there's nothing, I confeſs, more inconſiſtent with that blind Obedience than the Liberty of the Preſs, becauſe it gives them an opportunity to ſee what can be ſaid againſt that or any other Darling Notion of the Prieſts; and then it's a great odds but that rational Creatures will be governed by their own Reaſon, and no longer endure the Clergy to be Lords of their Faith.

7. In fine, if it be unlawful to let the Preſs continue free, leſt it furniſh Men with the Reaſons of one Party as well as the other, it muſt be as unlawful to examine thoſe Reaſons: for if the laſt be a Duty, the firſt cannot be unlawful, becauſe it's only a Means to the laſt in providing thoſe Reaſons which Men are bound to try and examine; except an implicit Belief be a Duty, which muſt neceſſarily bring Men back again to Popery. For if it be now unlawful to examine the Reaſons on all

ſides, for fear of having other Sentiments than thoſe the Clergy approves, it was no leſs unlawful at the time of the Reformation, which was wholly built upon this freedom of examining the Opinions of the Prieſts, and rejecting them if they judged them falſe. This the brave *Luther* did ſingly and by himſelf in defiance of the whole Church, and this any Man now hath the ſame right to do: So that it's evident the Freedom or Reſtraint of the Preſs depends on this ſingle Queſtion, Whether we ought to be free, or Slaves in our Underſtandings? or, in other words, Proteſtants or Papiſts? If the firſt, there cannot be the leaſt colour for leaving the Conduct of Religion ſo wholly to a few Prieſts, that nothing ſhall be publiſhed about it but what they think fit, than which nothing can ſavour more of a Popiſh, ſlaviſh, and proſtitute Compliance.

What, *Sir*, could be more ſurprizing to that Honourable Houſe, whereof you are a moſt worthy Member, than a Motion to this purpoſe; That becauſe making of Laws is a thing of great Conſequence, and Country Gentlemen are ſubject to miſtake, that therefore the Houſe ought to be regulated, by appointing a Licenſer to judg what ſhould be ſpoke in it? As ridiculous as ſuch a Motion would be, I would willingly know why 'tis not as unaccountable to hinder a whole Nation the freedom of debating Matters of Religion, which (ſince they are not able, like their Repreſentatives, to aſſemble in one Room) cannot well be done but by letting the Preſs be open to every one to publiſh his Reaſons; which ought not to be denied, as long as every one in the Nation has as much a right, not only to judg for himſelf in religious, as any Legiſlators can have to judg for him in Civil Matters, but is as much obliged to uſe all poſſible means to inform his Judgment; and conſequently there is as little reaſon to deny Liberty of debating in one Caſe as the other.

8. The Reformation is wholly owing to the Preſs: For tho there were ſeveral able Men who, before *Printing* was known, moſt vigorouſly oppoſed the growing Errors of the Weſtern Church; yet all they could do was to little or no purpoſe,

because they had no easy and ready way to communicate their thoughts to any great number: but no sooner was the *Invention of Printing* made useful, but a poor Monk who discovered at least the grosser Cheats of the Priesthood, was made capable of imparting those Notions, which drew almost a Moiety from the Romish Superstition, which lost ground every where, as the Press was either more or less free. Therefore it was not strange that the Popish Clergy, since they could not confound the *Art of Printing*, should endeavour to turn it to their own Advantage, not only by hindring any new Book from being printed, but by expunging out of old ones whatever did not serve their turn: and herein they acted consistent with their Principles, which allows no Liberty of examining, and consequently denies all Freedom of the Press, which of all things does engage Men the most to do it. But what Pretence can the Protestants have for restraining it, who as they owe their Religion to its Liberty, so they cannot hinder it without destroying that Religion which has no other Foundation than that of every ones having a Right to examine those Reasons that are for or against any Opinion, in order to make a true and impartial Judgment? which can never be justified, if it be unlawful to permit the Press to be open for all Men to propose their Reasons to one another in order to their examining them.

And it cannot be denied, but that the Protestant Clergy, who are as ambitious for the most part as the Papists themselves to impose on the Consciences of the People, have by Persecution, Restraint of the Press, and other such methods, given the Papists (who have scarce any thing to plead for themselves but the Practice of their Adversaries) too just an occasion to insult them, who are (they say) no other than a pack of Hypocrites, in doing the very same things they so loudly condemn; and that it's little less than a Demonstration, that the Principles by which they pretend to justify their Separation, are very absurd, since they are forced to act contrary to them in every point. And what was it in truth but these shameful Practices, that put a stop

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to the Reformation, which at firſt, like a mighty Torrent, overwhelmed all that oppos'd it, but has ever ſince gone back both in eſteem and intereſt, and at laſt, if Men do not change their conduct, will be quite loſt? For how can it be otherwiſe, ſince that method (Proteſtantiſm and Popery being ſo oppoſite) that preſerves the one, muſt neceſſarily deſtroy the other?

The taking a contrary method not only hinder'd the farther ſpreading of the Reformation, but was the cauſe that where it did prevail it was no more perfect: for tho the Reformers deſerve juſt Commendation for what they did, yet being bred up in ſo much Ignorance and Superſtition, they could not remove thoſe vaſt loads of Corruptions which had been ſo long a gathering. But if thoſe that ſucceeded them had taken the ſame liberty in examining theirs as they did their Predeceſſors Opinions, it's impoſſible but that time muſt have diſcover'd the Truth, and made them agree at leaſt in all matters of moment. But inſtead of this, they became as guilty of a blind Obedience as the Papiſts; and it was a ſufficient proof of any thing amongſt the different Sects, if *Luther*, *Calvin*, Church of *England*, ſaid ſo: nothing more common than that *I ſubmit all to Mother Church*, and ſuch like Phraſes; which that Men ſhould effectually do, there were Penal Laws enacted to force them, and no *Printing* or *Preaching* allow'd to thoſe that durſt ſee farther than the firſt Reformers (whoſe Eyes at the beſt were but half open, tho they ſaw very well for thoſe times of Darkneſs, and in reſpect of the Papiſts who may juſtly be reckon'd to be quite blind) the conſequence of which was, that the Differences between the ſeveral Sects were widened, and they all run daily farther and farther into Uncharitableneſs, Ignorance, Superſtition, and Fanaticiſm.

9. Whoſoever obſerves with what Zeal our Divines condemn the Popiſh Clergy for not ſuffering their Laity to read Proteſtant Authors, would hardly think it poſſible for them to be ſo diſingenuous as to appoint ſome ſpiritual Dragons to watch the *Preſs*, leſt any thing ſhould ſteal from thence that's not for their

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turn. Let us hear only (for they all write after the same manner) the learned Dr. *Clegget*, who in his *Perſuaſive to an ingenuous Trial*, p. 28. tells us, "They that have a good Cauſe will "not fright Men from conſidering what their Adverſaries ſay by "denouncing Damnation againſt them, nor forbid them to read "their Books, but rather encourage them ſo to do, that they "may ſee the difference between Truth and Error, Reaſon and "Sophiſtry, with their own eyes. This is the effect of a well-"grounded confidence in Truth, and there's this ſign of a good "Cauſe apparently diſcernable in the Application of the Clergy "of this Church (of *England*) both to their Friends and Ene-"mies, they deſire the one and the other to conſider impartially "what is ſaid for us as well as againſt us. And whatſoever "Guides of a Party do otherwiſe, they give juſt cauſe to thoſe "that follow them to examine their Doctrines ſo much the more "carefully, by how much they are unwilling to have them exa-"mined. It's a bad ſign when Men are loth to have their Opi-"nions ſeen in the day, but love Darkneſs more than Light. If the Church of *England* will own this to be a juſt Character of them, they ought to be ſo far from endeavouring to obtain a Law to reſtrain the *Preſs*, that they are obliged, did they apprehend any ſuch deſign, to oppoſe it to their utmoſt, and to encourage their Adverſaries to print their Sentiments, and the People to read them, that they may *ſee the difference between Truth and Error, Reaſon and Sophiſtry, Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy, Diſſenting and Conforming, with their own eyes.* Taking a contrary method only affords a new Argument for the Liberty of the *Preſs*, becauſe they give their Followers a juſt Cauſe to *examine their Doctrines ſo much the more carefully, by how much more unwilling they are to have them examined. It's a bad ſign*, &c. In a word, did the Proteſtant Guides act as ſuch, inſtead of frighting Men from conſidering what their Adverſaries ſay by denouncing Damnation againſt them, they would tell their Auditors the great ſin of being biaſs'd by them in the choice of their Opinions, and that the more important any Controverſy is,

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the more Reaſon there is for the Liberty of the *Preſs*, that they may examine with all the diligence imaginable the Tenets of their Adverſaries as well as of their Guides; and that the more they heard the one Party, the more they ſhould read the other; and that if they ſhould fall into any Error by ſo doing, they would not be accountable for it. For tho there is not (as the Papiſts vainly imagine) ſuch a Guide as would infallibly lead every Man into every Truth, yet that every ones Reaſon as a Guide is infallible, becauſe God that deſigns that all Men (if it be not their own fault) ſhould be for ever happy, has given them no other Guide but their Reaſon to bring them to that Happineſs; and therefore as ſure as God himſelf is infallible, the following that Guide muſt bring them to that happy ſtate God deſigned the following it ſhould bring them to. And on the contrary, that God, who is *the Rewarder of thoſe only that diligently ſeek him*, would condemn them as unprofitable Servants, who inſtead of uſing their Talents to find out his Will, did abandon themſelves to the uncertain chance of Education and the Religion in faſhion, which varies with every Age and every Country. As thus they ought to preach to the People, ſo they ſhould as little ſcruple to tell the Magiſtrate that by permitting an entire Liberty he did nothing but his Duty; but by a Reſtraint of the *Preſs* he did not only ſhew himſelf guilty of a blind Obedience, but did endeavour to make a whole Nation ſo, and was to anſwer not only for all the Errors and other ill Conſequences himſelf cauſed by a Reſtraint, but likewiſe of abetting all other Magiſtrates that think themſelves in the right in doing the like; and that tho he ſhould chance to be in the right himſelf, yet he could not know how many he was the cauſe of being all their Lives in the wrong, who might be ſo only, becauſe, not having liberty to publiſh the Reaſons they had to embrace ſuch Opinions, they could not meet with any that could give them Satisfaction; and in truth, writing againſt any Opinion where Men have not the liberty to ſhew the Reaſons why they hold it, is but writing at random, becauſe Mens Reaſons

ſons cannot be confuted till they are known. Such Arguments as theſe a Proteſtant Clergy, that's true to their own Principles, ought to uſe both to the Prince and People, and not prevaricate with God and Man, and talk backward and forward juſt as it ſerves their turns. *If Baal be God, ſerve him; if not, ſerve the Lord.*

10. I can ſee no reaſon why they that are for tying Men to that Interpretation of Scripture a Licencer ſhall approve, and therefore put it in his power to hinder all others from being publiſhed, can with any juſtice condemn the Popiſh Clergy for not licenſing the Bible it ſelf for the Laity to read it. For if the Bible is to be tranſlated into the vulgar Tongue, to what end is it, but that the People by reading it may judg what is their Duty in the moſt obſcure and difficult places? Ought they not then to ſee the different Tranſlations and Explications? If they are to be denied this, leſt they apprehend it in a Senſe different from that of the Licencer and his Party, the ſame Reaſon will reſtrain the People from promiſcuouſly reading the Bible, becauſe they may, and frequently do apprehend it in ſuch a Senſe as their Guides do not approve; and if that be a Crime, all the means that are neceſſary to hinder it muſt be a Duty; and therefore if it cannot be prevented without hindring the Laity from reading the Bible, it's a Crime to ſuffer them to read it.

11. This Reſtraint gives a great handle to thoſe that believe only Natural Religion to argue againſt the Chriſtian; for, ſay they, 'tis no ſmall Preſumption that the Clergy themſelves are conſcious of the Falſneſs of their Religion, becauſe they dare not ſuffer it to undergo a fair Trial, but do what they can to ſtifle all the Reaſons that can be urged againſt it. The Clergy, ſay they, are ſo learned, and withal ſo numerous, that amongſt them they could not fail to expoſe and confound any thing that's writ againſt them, had they but Truth on their ſide, which they know is, next to the Almighty, ſtrong, and therefore needs no licenſing Tricks, or Stratagems, to make it victorious: Theſe are the mean Shifts that Error is forced to uſe againſt

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its Power. Theſe Men farther add, That if Chriſt and his Apoſtles obliged Men to try all things, how can they that pretend to be his Succeſſors (did they believe the Scriptures) hinder a fair trial of any thing relating to Religion? And can there be a fair Trial when all Parties have not the liberty to publiſh their Reaſons, that the People may compare and examine them by their common Notions, thoſe Teſts and Standards of all Truths? Has the Proteſtant Religion a fair Trial in *Italy*, where nothing can be heard in its defence? Thus 'tis that ſome Men expoſe our Religion on the one hand to the Inſults of Unbelievers, and on the other of Papiſts; which can never be avoided but by granting to all Sects an entire Liberty of the Preſs. All other methods equally ſerve to promote Error as Truth, and conſequently can never be the way that God ordained to diſtinguiſh the one from the other.

12. It may be objected, That by ſuch a latitude as this People may be ſeduced into falſe Religions, or into Hereſies and Schiſms. None can profeſs a Religion but either, becauſe upon examination he judges it to be true, or, that ſome by Intereſt makes him do ſo contrary to his Judgment, or elſe, becauſe he takes it on truſt without examining it. As to the firſt, If two Perſons profeſs different Religions, one the true, the other a falſe one, yet if they have been equally ſincere in their examination, they are equally in the way to Heaven; becauſe in following their Reaſon, they both have done what God requires: ſo two Men that equally act againſt their Judgment, the one profeſſing the Truth, the other not, are alike guilty: ſo alſo are they who equally take their Religion on truſt; and ſuch perverſe holding of a Religion, whether true or falſe, is Hereſy, as the other is Hypocriſy: and according as Men are more or leſs partial in examining, they are more or leſs heretical. So that 'tis not *what* a Man profeſſeth, but *how*, that juſtifies or condemns him before God. And there would be few, either Hereticks or Hypocrites, were there not Bribes annexed to ſome, and Awes to other religious Tenets; for then Men would not be afraid to examine

Thoſe for fear of finding them falſe, nor Theſe leſt they ſhould be true, nor to own or diſown either, according as they judg them true or falſe. And an entire Liberty of the *Preſs* would by degrees eſtabliſh religious Truth, becauſe that is ſupported by better, plainer, and more cogent Proofs than any falſe Opinions are; which are either miſchievous or burdenſome, or at the leaſt uſeleſs, whilſt the other by its Excellency and Uſefulneſs carries Evidence and Conviction with it.

As to Schiſms, they are cauſed by Mens impoſing their own Interpretations, inſtead of the expreſs Words of God, as neceſſary terms of Communion: which makes Proteſtant Impoſers not only Schiſmaticks but Hereticks, becauſe having laid down as a Fundamental of their Religion, that every one is to interpret Scripture for himſelf, they moſt obſtinately and perverſly (not to ſay knowingly) act againſt that Fundamental.

13. The moſt material Objection againſt the Liberty of the *Preſs* is, That without Licenſers, Atheiſm, Profaneneſs, and Immorality, as well as Sedition and Treaſon, may be publiſhed. The Commonwealth has the ſame reaſon to puniſh Men for thoſe as for theſe, becauſe they are all alike pernicious to humane Societies. And 'tis all the reaſon in the world that whoever aſſerts any ſuch Notions, whether in Diſcourſe, or from the Pulpit or Preſs, ſhould be ſeverely puniſhed. But this can be no more a reaſon to appoint Licenſers for the one than for the other; nor would it hinder the printing things contrary to Law, for none will be ſo mad as to deſire an *Imprimatur* for them: ſo that ſuch Pamphlets, whether there are or are not Licenſers, will come out only by ſtealth; and 'tis evident there were more of them printed when the Law for regulating the Preſs was in being, than ſince. To make the Laws againſt ſuch things ſeverer, and to oblige either the Printer or Bookſeller to ſet his Name to all Books whatever, will take away all pretence for appointing Licenſers, and will be the moſt effectual way to prevent publiſhing ſuch Books.

But

But before I leave this Head, I cannot but remark that they are no way guilty of Profaneneſs who out of Conſcience (to which profane and atheiſtical Perſons have no pretence) worſhip God after a miſtaken manner, becauſe all the honour Men are capable of giving an Almighty and Alknowing Being, conſiſts in the Intention and Deſign; and therefore to puniſh thoſe, who out of a holy Intention and pious Deſign worſhip God after that manner they judg acceptable to his Will, as profane Perſons or Blaſphemers, is the greateſt Crime next to real Blaſphemy, becauſe 'tis puniſhing Men for no other reaſon but for expreſſing their Zeal for the Honour of God, which they can no otherwiſe do than by worſhipping him as their Reaſon dictates, which they muſt either do, or not worſhip him at all, or elſe but with a mock Worſhip. And they that by force are made to break the ties of Conſcience, tho never ſo erroneous, cannot be good Subjects neither to God nor the King: ſo that Profaneneſs and Immorality cannot be deſtroy'd but by all Sects doing as they would be done unto; which muſt eſtabliſh an entire and univerſal Liberty, ſince they have all the ſame right to judg for themſelves, and are equally oblig'd to act according to that Judgment, and to communicate to others what they judg to be true: which perhaps was the reaſon that the Houſe of Commons ſo unanimouſly threw out the Bill for reſtraining the Preſs immediately before their addreſſing the King againſt Profaneneſs and Immorality. But to return,

If it be once thought unlawful to have nothing printed but of the ſide of the Church in faſhion, the ſame reaſon will at leaſt as ſtrongly hold againſt any thing being preached but of that ſide; becauſe if any thing is printed againſt that Church, there are ten thouſand Clergy (whom one would think a ſufficient Guard for Truth) to expoſe its Folly and Weakneſs, but 'tis not ſo eaſy for them to know, and conſequently to apply an Antidote to what is preached againſt them: wherefore they who are not for deſtroying that juſt and righteous Law that allows Liberty of Conſcience, ought to be very careful of the Freedom of the

Preſs, as the only means to guard and defend the other; and both being built on the ſame foundation, cannot (as has been already proved) be deſtroyed but by ſtriking at the foundation of the Proteſtant Religion. And,

Therefore it cannot be ſuppos'd that the chief Support of it, the Honourable Houſe of Commons, will ever conſent to the one or the other, eſpecially conſidering how much the Popiſh Intereſt increaſeth, and what Advantage of late it has got in *France*, *Germany*, and *Savoy*. And if the Popiſh Princes (as 'tis ſuppos'd) have enter'd into a Confederacy among themſelves to extirpate the Proteſtant Cauſe, ought not all Proteſtants (and all that are not for a blind Obedience deſerve that Name, that being the eſſential difference between it and Popery) inſtead of uſing reſtraint on one another, unite againſt the common Enemy?

Beſides, let it be conſider'd, 'tis not certain we ſhall be always bleſt with the Government of a Prince ſo entirely a Proteſtant as our Great and Glorious Deliverer. And if the Papiſts ſhould pervert one, and by that means get the publiſhing their Doctrines without contradiction, they might by degrees confound the Proteſtant Religion, ſo much weakned already by its Profeſſors acting ſo inconſiſtently with their own Principles. But were that Scandal removed, by allowing as entire a Liberty as the Proteſtant Principles require, there could be no danger of the prevailing of the Popiſh, or any other Superſtition. And 'tis remarkable, that nothing has been writ in behalf of Popery ſince the Expiration of the Act for Regulating the Preſs, ſo little is Liberty a Friend to that Superſtition.

14. But if, after all, there muſt be ſome appointed to determine the Fate of Religious Books, the Clergy, of all Men, ought not to be truſted with this Employ, becauſe they (not content with the Right they have from the Society of exerciſing the Eccleſiaſtical Function) do claim Power and Government diſtinct and independent of it, which they pretend is founded in Scripture; and conſequently they have no way, as Clergy,

of gaining any Dominion, Power, or Riches, more than what the Society will give them, but by wreſting the Holy Writ: And if, beſides the Pulpits, where they may preach what gainful Doctrines they pleaſe, without contradiction, they do ſo far engroſs the Preſs, as to hinder any thing from being printed but what favours their Deſigns; What may not ſuch a body of Men, (well vers'd in all the Arts of Perſwaſion) by their frequent Opportunities to diſplay them, impoſe on the too credulous People, eſpecially when all the ways to diſabuſe them are ſtopt up?

And if the Clergy in the more early and primitive times, perhaps ever ſince they were forbid *to lord it over the Heritage of God*, have made it their buſineſs to pervert Religion to advance their own Power; what reaſon is there to imagine that they would not do the ſame in theſe later and degenerate Ages? How, I pray, did the Clergy, who at firſt ſubſiſted by the Charity of the People, arrive to ſuch immenſe Grandeur and prodigious Riches, but by a conſtant Confederacy from time to time, carried on at the Expence of Religion? which (as their own Hiſtorians ſhew) was proportionably corrupted, as they encreaſed in Power and Riches, the one being made a ſtep to the other; and 'tis as evident where they are now moſt potent, there Religion is moſt perverted, and the People moſt enſlaved.

The chief way they effected this, was by perſwading the People to a blind Obedience, the conſequence of which was, that they muſt take the Clergy's own Word for all the Powers they thought fit to ſay the Scripture had given them, and to ſubmit to whatever they would determine in their own Cauſe, and for their own Intereſt. And there never was a Synod, whether Orthodox or not, but were for impoſing on the Laity, not only by Excommunicating, Anathematizing, and Damning, but by making the Magiſtrate uſe Violence on all that would not, contrary to their Conſciences, comply with their Determinations; by which means they at laſt arrived to ſuch an exceſs of Power over the Magiſtrate as well as the People, that

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one was no better than their Hangman, and the other than their Slaves. And have not the Proteſtant Clergy (from whom one ought to expect better things) taken the ſame method to make People blindly ſubmit to their Determinations? Nay, have they not outdone the Popiſh Clergy, in wreſting the Holy Writ to deſtroy the Engliſh Conſtitution, and enſlave the Nation, and in preaching up the Doctrine of Abſolute Obedience, than which nothing can be more inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of God, and the happineſs of Humane Societies, as knowing the only way to ſecure Tyranny in the Church was to get it eſtabliſh'd in the State? So that if the Proteſtant Clergy do not keep the People in as vile a Subjection as the Popiſh do, 'tis not owing to their good will; and therefore none that have any value for Religion, or any kindneſs for their Liberties, will truſt thoſe that lie under ſuch Temptation to pervert the Scripture, with the ſole licenſing Books of Religion. As we pray not to be led into Temptation, ſo we ſhould avoid leading others into it, eſpecially ſuch as in all probability they cannot withſtand.

15. The Diſcovery of Printing ſeems to have been deſign'd by Providence to free Men from that Tyranny of the Clergy they then groan'd under. And ſhall that which was intended by divine Goodneſs to deliver all from Sacerdotal Slavery, be made the means of bringing it on again? And if our Anceſtors could not defend themſelves from more than Egyptian Bondage, which the Pulpits brought on them, without the aſſiſtance of the Preſs, it's ſcarce poſſible that we ſhould be able to ſecure our Liberties againſt both, when by the help of the latter the Clergy have got better Abilities, as well as Opportunities, to impoſe on the Underſtandings of the People: and when Men are once enſlaved in their Underſtandings (which of all things ought to be moſt free) it's ſcarce poſſible to preſerve any other Liberty.

The truſting not only the Pulpits but the Preſs in the hands of the Clergy, is cauſing the *Blind to lead the Blind*, becauſe the generality of them are more likely to be guilty of a blind Obedience than the Laity, ſince they are obliged, as they value their Subſi-

Subſiſtence, right or wrong, to aſſert thoſe Religious Tenets they find eſtabliſh'd by Law; the truth of which they cannot any more be preſum'd to have impartially examin'd, than a mercenary Soldier the Juſtice of the Cauſe he is engag'd in; being ſent by their Friends to the Univerſities not to try the eſtabliſh'd Religion, whether 'tis right or wrong, but to profeſs it as a Trade they are to earn their bread by: and leſt they ſhould examine it, they are, even before they are capable, ſhackled with early Oaths and Subſcriptions. Which is the reaſon that the Prieſts are wondrous hot in every Country for the Opinions to which their Preferments are annexed; in one place fierce Calviniſts, in another violent Lutherans, in a third bigotted Papiſts; which could not ſo univerſally happen, did they in the leaſt examine thoſe Opinions they are engag'd to profeſs. And therefore there can be no reaſon to truſt the Preſs in hands of men ſo biaſs'd and prejudic'd, who cannot but be highly affronted to ſee the Laity do, what they durſt not, judg for themſelves, and not be blindly guided by them, who (poor men) are not truſted to guide themſelves. Yet for all this extraordinary precaution to keep the Clergy right and tight, and the great diſproportion of numbers between the Laity and them, 'tis evident that almoſt all the Errors and wrong Notions in Religion have had their riſe and chief Support from them. So that upon the whole, if the Preſs ſhould be truſted with any, it ought to be with Lay-men, who have no Powers, Prerogatives, or Privileges to gain by perverting of Scripture, ſince they pretend to none but what they receive from the Society. Tho I cannot but preſume that our Legiſlators, were there no other reaſon, yet out of reſpect to the Clergy, would not enact ſuch a Law as ſuppoſeth the greateſt and moſt learned of them not fit to be truſted with the printing but a Half-ſheet in Religion without conſent of a Lay Licenſer, who is to have an arbitrary Power over their Works. And there's no doubt but the Clergy would highly reſent ſuch a Law; tho I cannot ſee but the appointing Licenſers, whether of the Laity or Clergy, equally reflects on their Body, becauſe it

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equally ſuppoſeth they are unfit to be truſted. But if they are content with that Diſgrace, it muſt be becauſe either they cannot defend themſelves againſt their Adverſaries, or that they have a mind to give themſelves up to Lazineſs and Idleneſs, and not trouble themſelves with the laborious work of controverſial Divinity. But I ſhall ſay no more on this Point, having already ſufficiently ſhewed how deſtructive the reſtraining the Preſs is to Religion, which it cannot be without being in general prejudicial to Civil Societies, for whoſe good it was inſtituted, but eſpecially when it is perverted on purpoſe to enſlave them: and there never was a Nation which loſt their religious Rights that could long maintain their civil ones, for Prieſtcraft and Slavery go hand in hand. Therefore I ſhall be the ſhorter on what I have to ſay on a civil account, eſpecially conſidering that moſt of thoſe Reaſons that ſhew how deſtructive a Reſtraint of the Preſs is to Religious, will equally prove it to be ſo in Civil Affairs.

16. The greateſt Enjoyment that rational and ſociable Creatures are capable of, is to employ their Thoughts on what Subjects they pleaſe, and to communicate them to one another as freely as they think them; and herein conſiſts the Dignity and Freedom of humane Nature, without which no other Liberty can be ſecure: for what is it that enables a few Tyrants to keep almoſt all Mankind in Slavery, but their narrow and wrong Notions about Government? which is owing to the Diſcouragement they lie under of mutually communicating, and conſequently of employing their Thoughts on political matters; which did they do, 'tis impoſſible that the bulk of Mankind ſhould have ſuffered themſelves to be enſlaved from Generation to Generation. But the Arts of State, in moſt Countries, being to enſlave the People, or to keep them in Slavery, it became a Crime to talk, much more to write about political Matters: and ever ſince Printing has been invented, there have been, in moſt places, State-Licenſers, to hinder men from freely writing about Government; for which there can be no other reaſon, but

but to prevent the Defects of either the Government, or the Management of it, from being diſcovered and amended.

17. Fame, Reputation, and Honour, as they are the greateſt Incentives to all good and vertuous Actions, ſo they as much terrify Men from committing baſe and unworthy ones. And it cannot be reaſonably preſumed, conſidering the general Corruption of Mankind, but that the rich and powerful would frequently oppreſs thoſe beneath them, were they not afraid of loſing their Reputation, and expoſing themſelves either to the Contempt or Hatred of the People: for this Law of Reputation (if I may ſo call it) influences Men more than all other Laws whatever. But if there were a Licenſer of the Preſs, he might be prevailed on not only to hinder the injured from appealing to the People by publiſhing their Grievances, but to licenſe ſuch Stories only as mercenary Scriblers would write to juſtify the Oppreſſors, and to condemn the Oppreſt: which, as it would be the greateſt Encouragement for thoſe Men that are above the ordinary Remedies of Law to cruſh whom they pleaſe, ſo it would be the higheſt Injuſtice to deny the injured the laſt ſatisfaction of juſtifying their innocence to the World, which would be ſure to paſs a juſt Cenſure on the Oppreſſors; and this they would the more dread, becauſe if once they loſe their Credit with the People, they will be very unfit Inſtruments for a Court to uſe. Therefore 'tis no wonder if all that make an ill uſe of their Power, eſpecially thoſe who have cheated the Government as well as abuſed the People, do endeavour with all their might to have the Preſs regulated, leſt their Crimes being expoſed in Print, may not only render them odious to the People, but to the Government. In a word, All ſorts of Men whoſe Intereſt it is not to have their Actions expoſed to the Publick (which I am afraid are no ſmall number) will be for reſtraining the Preſs, and perhaps will add Iniquity to Iniquity, by pretending they do it out of Conſcience to ſuppreſs Immorality and Profaneneſs.

18. But this is not the worſt that may happen, becauſe the Preſs may be ſo managed, as to become a moſt powerful Engine

to overturn and ſubvert the very Conſtitution: for ſhould a Magiſtrate ariſe with Arbitrary Deſigns in his head, no Papers that plead the Rights and juſt Privileges of the People would be ſtamp'd with an *Imprimatur:* Then the Preſs would be employed only to extend the Prerogative beyond all bounds, and to extol the Promoters of Arbitrary Power as the chief Patriots of their Country, and to expoſe and traduce thoſe that were really ſo; which would be the greateſt Diſcouragement not only to all brave and vertuous Actions, but would be apt to make the People miſtake their Friends, when they had not the Liberty to publiſh a Vindication of their Principles or Actions, for their Enemies. In a word, if the Pulpits and *Weſtminſter-Hall* (as we have lately ſeen it) ſhould chime in with an Arbitrary Court, what can warn the People of their Danger, except the Preſs? But if that too be wholly againſt them, they may eaſily be ſo blinded as not to ſee the Chains that are preparing for them, till they are fettered beyond all power of Redemption; for there can never be wanting a thouſand plauſible Stories, and ſeemingly fair Pretences, to amuſe and divert them from perceiving their real Danger. And if we look into the Hiſtory of *Europe*, we ſhall find more Nations wheedled than forced out of their Liberties; tho Force afterward was neceſſary to maintain what was got at firſt by Fraud.

19. 'Tis ſo far from being impoſſible, that a People may be thus impoſed on to their utter ruin; that 'tis probable another Generation ſeeing nothing but the Royal Prerogative highly magnified, may be bred up with the Opinion of being born Slaves. And were we not almoſt brought to that paſs in the late Reigns? when nothing came out with *Allowance* but what was to juſtify ſuch Opinions; and if ſome good men (not to mention the Prince of *Orange*'s third Declaration) eſpecially about the time of the Revolution, had not had the Courage privately to print ſome Treatiſes to undeceive the People, and to make them ſee the fatal Conſequences of thoſe Doctrines which by the reſtraint of the Preſs paſs'd for divine and ſacred Truths; the Nation had

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tamely ſubmitted to the yoke. And as it cannot be denyed but that thoſe Papers in a great meaſure opened our eyes, ſo it may juſtly be hoped that none that ſaw the miſerable Condition that the Act for regulating the Preſs would have brought us into, will be inſtrumental in reeſtabliſhing that Law. No; thoſe Men ſure who ſo much exclaimed againſt it in the late Reigns, will take all care imaginable to prevent it now. But if theſe very men who may juſtly be ſaid to be written into their places, and owe their Preferments to the freedom of examining thoſe ſlaviſh Doctrines of the former Reigns; if theſe Men, I ſay, can ſo far forget themſelves as to be for a Law which till themſelves were uppermoſt they thought tended only to inſlave us, there cannot be, I think, a greater Argument for all others to oppoſe it. We are, God be thanked, bleſt with the Government of the beſt of Kings, who as he hazarded every thing to reſcue our Liberties when in the extremeſt Danger, ſo he places the Glory of his Reign in preſerving them entire, and tranſmitting them ſo to Poſterity. And therefore none that love his Glory can be for reſtraining the Preſs, which now as it can ſerve to no other end than to create Jealouſies in the People, who cannot forget what former Reigns deſign'd by it, ſo it may hereafter hazard all our Liberties. *Under a good King we may juſtly expect ſuch Laws as will not expoſe us to, but ſecure us from the Oppreſſions of an ill one.* The beſt things when perverted become the very worſt; as Religion it ſelf, when it degenerates into Superſtition, ſo Printing, which in it ſelf is no ſmall Advantage to Mankind, when it is abuſed, may be of moſt fatal conſequence. Secure but the Liberty of the Preſs, and that will, in all probability, ſecure all other Liberty; but if that once falls into the hands of ill deſigning Men, nothing that we hold dear or precious is ſafe. And experience manifeſts, that whereſoever That of the Preſs is denied, there no Other is preſerved. Moſt Countries in *Europe* maintained their Freedom tolerably well till the Invention of Printing; but when that was ſuffered to ſpeak nothing but Court-Language, People were by degrees gull'd and cheated of their Liberty. Had not

the late King tack'd Popery to Slavery, he might with the greateſt eaſe imaginable have enſlav'd us; and methinks the danger we have ſo miraculouſly eſcaped, ſhould fright us from ever enacting any of thoſe Methods into a Law that ſo much contributed to that danger.

20. That which alone would engage me, were I a Senator, to oppoſe the Reſtraint of the Preſs, is, that a Parliament is to take cognizance of all ſorts of things which ſome Men of Gentlemen-like Education may not have much conſidered; and therefore the peruſing what thoſe without doors, who have made ſuch things their buſineſs, have writ, may be none of the worſt means of informing themſelves; but a Reſtraint of the Preſs may in a great meaſure hinder them from receiving this Satisfaction, becauſe Licenſers might be prevailed on to ſuffer but one ſide to publiſh their Sentiments even in Matters of the greateſt Conſequence. I have met with ſome Members who have frankly owned that the incomparable *Argument againſt the Standing Army* gave them great Inſight into that grand Point, which, ſaid they, had not the Preſs been open, would never have appeared, nor any thing on that ſide, tho a number of Pamphlets on the other, which, with the noiſe of ſelf-intereſted Perſons, would in all probability have carried things quite otherwiſe. And ſeeing they could not foreſee how frequently ſuch things might happen, this alone, ſaid they, was enough to convince them of the neceſſity of the Liberty of the Preſs, ſince they could not be too ſecure of that ineſtimable Jewel Liberty, which, if once loſt, was ſcarce ever to be recovered, eſpecially if ſeized by a domeſtick Power.

21. I doubt not but there are ſeveral well-meaning Men for regulating the Preſs; who, did they conſider how ſubject all things are to change, could not but be apprehenſive that this Engine of their own contriving might be turned upon themſelves, and made to ruin thoſe very Deſigns they thought to promote by it. For the Preſs (as a witty Gentleman obſerves) is like a Jackanapes, he who has him in his hands may make him bite

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whom he pleaſes, and therefore 'tis their ſafeſt way to keep their Jackanapes in their own hands. And it cannot but ſhew a great deal of hardineſs to make ſuch a Law as may produce very fatal Conſequences even to the Makers themſelves, who will then deſerve no pity, ſince they are ſcourg'd with Rods of their own providing: and 'tis the more probable this may happen ſo hereafter, ſince even at preſent ſuch a Law has but an untoward Aſpect upon moſt Parties; for one Party, tho he is pleaſed with it in religious, yet diſlikes it in civil Matters: another thinks the contrary to be his Intereſt; a third is ſatisfied with having ſuch or ſuch Sects reſtrained from Printing, but would be glad that others had that Liberty; a fourth, who cares not how all the Sectaries are dealt with, is yet afraid, that if the Preſs be in the hands of moderate Church-men, none will be ſuffered to write any more Letters to a Convocation-man, or a *Manicipium Eccleſiaſticum*, or ſuch like Books; a fifth is afraid leſt this Power ſhould get into the hands of the rigid ones, for then the others will be run down as Trimmers, Latitudinarians, and what not. The ſame may be ſaid with reſpect to other Religious Opinions, about which Men of the ſame Church are divided, and the like may be as well obſerved in civil Matters, but I leave every one to make that Remark for himſelf; ſo that if all Parties caſt up their accounts, there are very few of them but will find a Reſtraint of the Preſs to be againſt even their preſent Intereſt.

22. I might add a great number of other Reaſons, becauſe as many things as are worth knowing, ſo many Arguments there are for the Liberty of the Preſs; what can be more uſeful than Hiſtory, and the Knowledg of our Anceſtors Actions? A faithful account of which can ſcarce be expected in a Reign that has a deſign to diſguiſe Truth, and to keep us in ignorance of thoſe noble and generous Notions our Anceſtors had of Liberty, and how they aſſerted theirs upon all occaſions. As for what concerns the preſent time, I ſhall only ſay, that for my own part I ſhould be glad, eſpecially when at a diſtance from *London*, (and

I ſuppoſe other Country Gentlemen may be of the ſame mind) to divert my ſelf with ſome other News-papers beſides the Gazette, which would hardly be permitted if the Preſs were regulated. As for Books of Philoſophy, and of other Arts and Sciences, I can ſee no reaſon why there ſhould be any Reſtraint on them, or why the licenſing them ſhould be intruſted with the Clergy, as by the late Act, except it be to hinder ſuch Books from being printed as tend moſt to inform Mens Judgment, and make them reaſon clearly, things very dangerous to a blind implicit Obedience. Beſides, an excellent Diſcovery in Nature may be hindred from being publiſh'd, on pretence that 'tis inconſiſtent with Religion: for the time has been when aſſerting the *Antipodes* has been no leſs than Hereſie; and the Motion of the Earth a Crime worthy the Inquiſition, and with as little Reaſon (not to mention Dr. *Burnet*'s ingenious Tracts) has the moſt uſeful Book that was ever written in Philoſophy, the *Eſſay of humane Underſtanding*, been condemned as inconſiſtent with the Articles of the Chriſtian Religion. As for *Phyſick*, tho the licenſing Books therein were wholly truſted with ſome of the College, the moſt uſeful Piece in that Science, either becauſe the Licenſers were engaged in another Method of Practice, or becauſe it may take from their Advantage, by preſcribing a cheaper and eaſier way of Cure, or out of Envy, or a thouſand other Reaſons, might be hindred from ſeeing the Light, to the no ſmall detriment not only of the preſent, but future Ages. As to *Law*, I ſhall only ſay, If there are any Abuſes crept into it, the likelieſt way to have them reformed is not by reſtraining the Preſs.

23. Were Licenſers unbiaſt, uncorrupt, and infallible, there might be good Reaſon to truſt them with an Arbitrary Power to paſs what Sentences they pleas'd on Books; but if we are to judg of the future by the paſt, they are almoſt as likely to be one as the other. Men of Senſe, (and others ought not to be truſted with it) without being reſolved to make the moſt of it, will not care to be condemned to the drudgery of reading all the

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Trash that comes to be printed, nothing but neceſſity will make ſuch Perſons ſubmit to it, and that neceſſity will make them leſs able to withſtand Temptation. So that the appointing Licenſers will be as bad as laying a Tax on Learning, ſince by delaying to look over Books, eſpecially thoſe that require haſte to be printed, and by other tricks (for there are Myſteries in all Trades) they may make People pay what they pleaſe for their *Allowance*.

24. But this is not the worſt, it will be a great hindrance to the promoting of Knowledg and Truth, by diſcouraging the ableſt Men from writing for ſuch Perſons, eſpecially after having once had the liberty of publiſhing their own Thoughts, will not be content to have their Works lie at the Mercy of an ignorant or at the beſt of an unleiſured Licenſer, who upon a curſory view may either condemn the whole to perpetual Darkneſs, or ſtrike out what he pleaſeth, perhaps the moſt material things. And tho a living Author may ſubject himſelf to this, yet none will be content that the Labours of a deceaſed Friend ſhould be ſo ſerved; ſo that the Works of ſuch a Perſon, tho never ſo famous in his Life-time, ſhall be loſt to all Poſterity. Beſides, is it not intolerable, that every time a Man has a mind to make any Alteration or Addition between the licenſing of the Copy, and the printing it off, that he muſt as often hunt after the ſame Licenſer to obtain his leave, for the Printer could not go beyond his licenſed Copy, when in the mean time the Preſs, to his no ſmall damage, muſt ſtand ſtill?

In ſhort, tho there might ſeem to be ſome reaſon to condemn a Perſon that upon a fair Trial had been found guilty of writing immoral things, or againſt the Government, to the Puniſhment of never writing again but under the Authority of an Examiner; yet what reaſon can there be that thoſe that never offended, nay that the whole Commonwealth of Learning ſhould be ſubject to ſo ſevere Uſage, which too is the way to have none but Fools and Blockheads plague the World with their Impertinence, and make an *Imprimatur* (as it did formerly) ſignify

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ſignify no more than that ſuch a Book is fooliſh enough to be printed?

'Tis objected, that without Licenſers any one may reflect on whom he has a mind to, ſo as that moſt People ſhall be ſenſible whom he means, tho he mention but two Letters of his Name, or uſeth ſome other Deſcription, by which means he is out of the reach of the Law.

This may be an Argument for the forbidding all Printing, but none for appointing Licenſers; for 'tis much more reaſonable for all to have the Liberty to vindicate themſelves the ſame way they chance to be aſperſed, than to let the Licenſer's Party abuſe all others, and the Preſs not open for them to juſtify themſelves. But if any one reflects upon another after this manner, let him make appear whom it is he means, or elſe let him be eſteemed in Law to intend that Perſon that takes it to himſelf.

This I think is all that can be objected as to Civil Matters, except what relates to Sedition and Treaſon, for an Anſwer to which I refer the Reader to §. 13.

I have no more to add, but that my greateſt Ambition next to ſerving the Publick, (which here I have endeavoured to do without ſo much as once thinking how it may affect me in my own private Concerns) is to approve my ſelf to be,

SIR,

Your moſt faithful and

devoted humble Servant.

Lately Publiſhed,

THE Militia Reform'd; or an eaſy Scheme of furniſhing *England* with a conſtant Land-Force, capable to *prevent* or to *ſubdue* any Forein Power; and to maintain perpetual Quiet at home, without endangering the Publick Liberty. Sold by *Andrew Bell* in *Cornhill*.